

## مجلة جامعة بابل، العلوم الإنسانية، المجلد ٢٦، العدد ٤: ٢٠١٨

## Antonymous Adjectives Markedly Used

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## Abstract

The concept of “markedness in the work of Prague school linguists refers to relationships between two complementary or antonymous terms which can be distinguished by the presence of a feature (+a versus -a). Such a position can occur at various linguistic levels. Markedness contrasts for example, can arise at the morphological level, when one of the two words is derived from the other and therefore contains an explicit formal marker such as a prefix (profitable - unprofitable). Markedness contrasts also appear at the semantic level in many pairs of gradable antonymous adjectives, especially scalar ones.

**Keywords:** adjectives, attributive, agreement, antonymous, markedness.

## الخلاصة

ساهمت مدرسة براغ في مفهوم التمايز. وقد اقترحت لأول مرة كمصطلح لغوي من قبل Trubetzkoy 1939. حيث أصبح يحتل موقعا له أهمية كبيرة في علم الأصوات وغيرها من مجالات اللغويات. وضع علامة التعيين بشكل اساسي طورت من علم الأصوات حيث الرموز الصوتية كانت ملحوظة ادبيا للإشارة إلى ميزات إضافية مثل التعبير و الأنف أو الاستدارة. وقد تم توسيع مفهوم التمييز إلى مجالات أخرى من قواعد النحو أيضا، مثل التشكل، بناء الجملة وعلم الدلالات. إنها إلى حد ما فكرة غامضة. (انظر Trask :1999)

ويشير مفهوم التمايز في عمل علماء المدارس في براغ إلى العلاقات بين المصطلحين التكمليين أو المتضادين التي يمكن تمييزها بوجود ميزة (+a versus -a). مثل هذا الموقف يمكن أن يحدث على مستويات لغوية مختلفة. على سبيل المثال، يمكن أن تنشأ تناقضات علامة (MCs) على المستوى التركيبي، عندما تكون واحدة من كلمتين مشتق من الآخر، وبالتالي يحتوي على علامة رسمية واضحة مثل البادئة (مربحة - غير مربحة). كما تظهر مكس على المستوى الدلالي في العديد من أزواج من الصفات المتضاد المترج (GAA)، وخاصة منها العددية. (انظر Levinson 1983)

في اللسانيات، يشير التمايز إلى طريقة تغيير الكلمات أو إضافتها لإعطاء معنى خاص. يستخدم المنظرين المختلفين معايير مختلفة لتحديد أي عضو من الزوج يتم وضع علامة عليه وغير محدد. المعيار الأكثر شيوعا هو أن يتم استخدام العنصر غير الموسومة بشكل محايد، وهذا هو، دون مثل هذا المحتوى الدلالي محددة كما البند ملحوظ. (انظر Lehrer 1985)

الكلمات المفتاحية: الصفات، التوافق، التضاد.

## Introduction

The Prague School contributed the notion of markedness. It was first proposed as a linguistic term by Trubetzkoy 1939. It has come to occupy a position of a considerable importance in phonology and other areas of linguistics. Markedness is “originally developed from phonology where phonetic symbols were literary marked to indicate additional features such as voicing, nasalization or roundness. The concept of markedness has been extended to other areas of grammar as well, such as morphology, syntax and semantics. It is somewhat a fuzzy notion”.

(See Trask :1999)

The concept of “markedness in the work of Prague school linguists refers to relationships between two complementary or antonymous terms which can be distinguished by the presence of a feature (+a versus -a). Such a position can occur at various linguistic levels. Markedness contrasts (MCs) for example, can arise at the morphological level, when one of the two words is derived from the other and therefore contains an explicit formal marker such as a prefix (profitable - unprofitable). MCs also appear at the semantic level in many pairs of gradable antonymous adjectives (GAA), especially scalar ones”. (See Levinson 1983)

Markedness in linguistics, refers to the way in which words have been added or changed to give a special meaning. Different theorists use different criteria for determining which member of a pair is marked and which is unmarked. The most common criterion is that the unmarked item be used neutrally, that is, without such a specific semantic content as the marked item. (See Lehrer 1985)

Less natural from is a marked or a non-basic form. An unmarked form is a basic, default one. “The form of the word conventionally chosen to the lemma form is typically the form that is the least marked.

The literature has not agreed on a precise definition of markedness; in general, unmarked often refers either to the simpler structure or to the more default structure in a set of minimally contrasting structures”.

(See Whaley 1997: 288)

Many words are capable of a variety of meanings. They are able to be used in a marked or unmarked manner of contrasts. To understand which form (marked or unmarked) being used is easily and clearly determined by those who are speaking and those who are listening. Word must not be taken out of the context. A linguistic item may be marked with respect to certain other items, but unmarked with respect to yet another. Markedness is context dependent. Words are not marked or unmarked in and of themselves, but are (un)marked in relation to another. It is not sufficient to say that "fall" is an unmarked term, instead if it is unmarked with respect to "short". (See Murphy 2003)

### 1.1. Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that:

1-Iraqi ESLL lack a clear understanding to the basis of markedness as it is a vague concept. They face difficulty to understand or distinguish (un)marked items. Marked forms and structures are typically both structurally and semantically more complex than unmarked ones.

2-Iraqi ESLL can not avoid ambiguity in (un)marked antonymous adjectives when using them. They do not display sensitivity to particular items or uses.

### 1.2. Value of the Study

The study is hoped to be valuable as:

1-It presents a theoretical and a practical contribution in the field of foreign language learning as it investigates the effect of such using and understanding.

2-It is hoped to be useful for teachers, learners, text book designers and any one concerned in the field of English language teaching/learning.

### 1.3. Limits of Study

The concept of markedness has been extended to all areas of linguistics.

This study is limited to the concept occurring in antonymous adjectives only. The researchers take Lehrer's list of criteria as a model to determine which an antonymous adjective is marked or unmarked. (See Lehrer1985:400 and appendix B). Moreover the study focuses on the students' written achievements excluding the side of prosody concerning the topic.

#### 1.4. Objectives of the Study

The study aims at:

- 1-pointing out the extent to which antonymous adjectives are used properly.
- 2-illustrating the most common criteria that can be used in making any specific sentence (un)marked.

#### 1.5. Markedness in Adjectives

Adjectives are classified in terms of gradability (See Lyons 1977 and Quirk et.al 1985). Gradable adjectives denoting a property vary by degrees (deep, fast, big). Gradability can be indicated by the use of the degrees modifiers (very, much, highly and extremely) and by comparison markers (i.e. addition of the suffixes -er and -est) or by modification with "more " and "most". The modifier locates the adjective on a scale of comparison, at a position higher or lower than the one indicated by the adjective alone. Adjectives denoting the highest position on a scale are non-gradable (e.g. dead, principal, and pregnant). An adjective can be extensional and gradable (e.g. an extremely red dress) or scalar and gradable (e.g. very small elephant).

Lehrer (1985:398) states that "markedness has been used as a cover term for several related phenomena which distinguish the marked member of antonym pair from the unmarked one. He also denotes that if the name of the semantic scale is morphologically related to one of the antonyms, it is related to the unmarked member as the case in the name of the scale length which is related to the unmarked long rather than the marked short".

The orientation usually indicates whether "the adjective receives a positive or negative interpretation. Thus, the adjectives intelligent and sample have a positive orientation, whereas the adjectives stupid and simplistic have a negative orientation. The unmarked adjective denotes a generic property without explicitly making reference to a noun or a standard (tall) in the question:

1- How tall is Peter?

The marked adjective denotes a property that deviates from the norm, short in the question:

2-How short is Peter?

Here the orientation of the adjective is highly dependent on the contextual pragmatic factors.

Most of attributes have an orientation to think of them as natural dimensions in a hyperspace, where each end of any dimension is anchored at the point of origin of the space. The point of origin is the expected or default value, derivation from it leads to and is called the marked value of the attribute. The antonyms narrow and wide can illustrate this general linguistic phenomenon known as markedness".

3- The road is too meter width.

4-The road is two meter narrow.

Thus the primary member "wide" is unmarked term, the secondary member "narrow".

Osgood (1969:74) shows that the semantically unmarked term is almost always the positive term of the opposition while the negative term is marked.

5- How high is the bridge? (High-positive)

6- How low is the bridge? (Low negative)

Positive unmarked forms of the adjective could be used, and the negative marked form could be reserved for consistent contexts with their presuppositions. They have a high degree of predictability within a system or a given text.

Battistella (1990:124) shows that "it is an evaluative characteristic of the meaning of the word which restricts its usage to an appropriate pragmatic context. Words that

encode a desirable state (beautiful/unbiased) have a positive orientation while words that represent undesirable states have a negative orientation within the particular syntactic class of adjectives. Orientation can be expressed as the ability of an adjective to ascribe, in general, a positive or negative quality to the modified item making it better or worse than similar unmodified item”.

### 1.6. Antonyms as Gradable Opposites

The opposites set that is gradable includes many common opposites in pairs that are prototypical that include (tall/short, big/little, happy /sad, high/low, good/bad). The property defines such a set is that the opposite qualities of the name are gradable and they can be understood as more or less, thus, a scale as dimension with each pair may be recognized as neutral and midinterval one, like hot and cold which show ends that look opposite of the temperature scale and are look gradable. Therefore, we can say

7- A is colder than B.

8- C is fairly warm.

9- D is very cold.

There is a midinterval among the poles which look opposite stated by "hot" and "cold". Binary oppositions frequently have marked terms and unmarked ones. The terms above are not entirely of an equivalent weight as the unmarked one is neutral and positive in contrast to the other (the marked one).

A similar kind of marked / unmarked distinction is found in polar oppositions such as long/short, high/low, and old/young, in the case of measuring things by length rather than by shortness.

10- This is ten feet long.

Rather than

11- This is ten feet short.

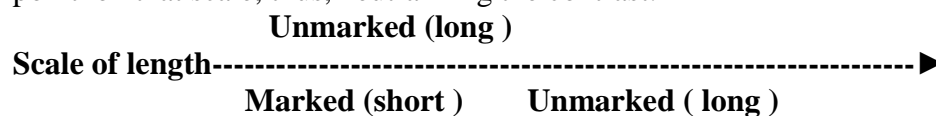
Thus, when we ask questions about length, we say:

12- How long is that rope?

Rather than

13- How short is that rope ?

Sentence (13) contains the assumption that the rope is short , while no equivalent assumption is present in (12). This means that if the two antonyms contrast with reference to a scale of measurement, the unmarked one is capable of referring to any point on that scale, thus, neutralizing the contrast:



(See Leech 1981:114)

### 1.7. Types of Markedness

Linguists state certain “types for markedness which can be summarized as the following:

1- Overt coding Markedness

Markedness as overt coding in English present tense verbs (the third person singular) is marked by (-s), whereas other person number forms are unmarked.

2- Featurness Markedness

Markedness specification for a feature (featurness ) such as lion / lioness. Lion lacks specification for gender, so it appears in neutralization contexts and it is unmarked. (See Jacobson 1932:37)

3- Markedness as restricted cross linguistic distribution.

The term markedness is used to refer to the continuum between language universal and language particular properties, with completely unmarked proprieties being found in all languages while externally marked properties are found quite rarely. (See Archangeli 1997:2)

#### 4- Typological Markedness

Markedness as a cluster of correlating properties of meaningful categories.

<i>Unmarked</i>	<i>marked</i>
singular	plural
present	past
3 <sup>rd</sup> person	2 <sup>nd</sup> person
active	passive

(See Croft 2003:197)

5- Markedness as dispreference of difficult structures (unnaturalnees). Certain structural characteristics which are permitted by universal grammar are clearly preferred by language, others avoided it is all possible. (See Wurzel 1994:2591)

#### 6- Markedness as rarity or unexpectedness

To some extent we can equate the term unmarked with regular, normal, usual and marked with irregular, abnormal, exceptional or unusual. (See Tallerman 1998:19 and Radford 1988:39)

#### 7- Markedness as derivation from setting of a parameter that is default.

To construe the notions marked and unmarked is in terms of language learning, the marked case must be learned as a language particular fact, whereas the unmarked one is what the language learner will assume to be the case, in the absence of facts to the contrary". (See van Riemsdijk and Williams 1986:136)

### 1.8. Markedness Character in a Pair of Antonyms:

Antonym is commonly and used to achieve various rhetorical effects such as brevity, humor, witness, sarcasm or provocation of thoughts. It may be more involved in a given context than one of these effects, with one stronger effect than the other(s) rather than mutually exclusive.

Certain cases seem puzzling, but for the vast majority of pairs the marker is clear to be noticed. "Unpleasant", for example, carries the prefix (un - ) as an explicit marker and the case is similar to "impatient " marked by (im-) and "illegal " by (-il) and so on. (Un-) is the most productive of these negative affixes.

The fact that most antonyms are formed by the addition of a negative affix is a reminder that antonymy, like synonymy, is a semantic relation between words, not a semantic relation between concepts or meanings. Antonymy is a relation of opposition of meaning between words. Antonymy is frequently the semantic change that accompanies the addition of the negative prefix (un-).

### 1.9. Types of Antonyms

Several types of antonyms have been identified by specialists "which can be stated as the following:

**A- Polar antonyms:** long/short, gradable-longer (i.e. not very long). It means incompatible, but not complementary: it is neither short nor long; one term is marked (short); the other is neutral (long) in most contexts.

14- How long is it? Vs. How short is it?

**B- Equipollent antonyms:** hot/cold, neither term is neutral.

'Hotter' presupposes hot, 'colder' presupposes cold but 'longer' does not presuppose long.

15- This place is cold, but it is less cold.

**C- Overlapping antonyms:** good/bad, similar to polar antonyms, one member is marked, always the negative one, but things that are inherently of the negative kind can not be compared using the neutral term.

16- The earthquake was bad, but less bad / \* better than last year's.

**D- Reversives:** verbs that designate movement in opposite directions like rise/fall and tie/untie.

**E- Converses :** complementary pairs that typically exhibit a difference in a point of view .

*Above/ below*

*X above Y → Y below X .*

*Buy / sell*

*X buy Y from Z → Z sell Y to X .*

*Husband / wife*

*X be Y's husband → Y be X 's wife” .*

(See Cruse 1986:195-204)

### 1.10. Properties of Adjectives

As it is well known that “several aspects of the scales of gradable adjectives are linguistically relevant. Adjective scales can differ from each other in the degrees of measurement values they use, i.e. the dimension kind of measurement they introduce and their ordinary relation (Kennedy(1991), Seuren(1985) and Kennedy and McNally(2005)). Antonymous pairs like tall/short are distinguished because of their ordering relations. Tall/short for example make use of the same degrees and dimension (i.e. height) but their ordering relations are apposite from each other. Non – antonymous adjectives like tall and expensive differ in their dimension parameter (high and price respectively).

Kennedy and Mc.Nelly (2005:58) argue that the structure of the scale itself whether it is closed or open elderly is relevant in the understanding of degree modification of gradable adjectives. Adjectives like empty and full induce close scales (i.e. they have minimal and maximal values), whereas the scales of adjectives like long and short are open ended. This difference can be seen in the fact that a box can be totally empty or totally full, but it does not make sense to speak of the rope that is totally long or totally short. Modifiers such as ‘half’ are sensitive to this distinction as well as a box can be half empty or full, but it is not possible for a rope to be half long /short. (See Lehrer 1985)

The scale is lower closed (i.e. with minimal but not maximal value) or upper closed (i.e. with a maximal but not minimal value) even if it seems to be relevant. It is possible for a pipe to be fully straight; but not for it to be fully bent (with fully beading an upper end point modifier and only the scale of straight having an upper or maximal value)”.

### 1.11. Adjectives Opposition

A well known difference between “pairs of positive and negative adjectives is that the later are marked with respect to the former. This markedness has semantic consequences. (See Lehrer 1985:407)

How questions asking for the degree to which some object possesses a gradable property, typically do not assert that the property actually holds off the object to which the property applies. Negative adjectives in how questions, however, introduce the presupposition that the property they describe does not hold off the target predication. This is illustrated by the contrast between the two examples:

17- How narrow is the table? (presupposes that the table is narrow)

18- How wide is the table? (does not presuppose that the table is wide)

(See Christopher 2000:33-77)

Givon (1984:74) shows that the unmarked member of the opposition may be used in a situation when the object in the question can be characterized both in terms of

that member and in terms of its opposite, while the unmarked member in the question can only solicit a confirmation or a modification of itself in the response.

Question (positive)

19- How tall is he?

(a)- Very tall.

(b)- Very short.

Question (negative)

20- How short is he?

(a)- ? Very tall.

(b)- Very short.”

### 1.12. Types of Opposition

Markedness in pair of opposites occurs in the case when one number (for a variety of reasons) is more restricted in its use or less likely to occur in context, or carries an element that creates a contrast then, it will “stand out” (psychologically) to be said to be marked. Thus, the opposition can be one of the following types:

**1-Distribution:** long/short; long can be used in more constructions than “short”.

**2-Morphological:** possible / impossible;

**3-Semantic:**

21- How short is it? (Marked)

22-How long is it? (Unmarked)

Sentence (21) presupposes substantial lack extension. Sentence (22) is natural so it can equally be relatively long or short.

**4- Complementariness:** dead /alive, true / false inherent binarity.

**5- Antipodal:** black /white extremes along some scales.

**6-Antonymy:** graded / relative opposites that can be inflected.

### 1.13. Factors Affecting the “Goodness” of a Pair of Opposites.

Lehrer and Lehrer (1982 :483 ) state that the “detonation of antonyms also requires the qualification in which two antonyms should be within the same distance from the midpoint, that would assure that good/bad and excellent/terrible are antonyms, but in the same time excellent/bad and good/terrible are just near opposites.

Many linguists, as Cruse (1986) and Lehrer, and Lehrer: (1982) tried to state the factors that determine whether two words are just near opposites or antonyms summarized as:

1- Semantic opposition purity in many pairs that are of near opposites (shout /whisper). The semantic opposition would not exhaust the words meaning.

2-The case in which the semantic dimension could be suggested: with pairs of near opposite (e.g. country /town). It is difficult to decide what the relevant semantic dimension might be.

3- Correspondence of oppositional meaning: many opposites that are near (e.g. emaciated /tubby) have connotations that are very different.

4-Distant from the midpoint of a semantic dimension:

With many cases, a member in a pair of near-opposites ( terrible) looks to include more extremes value than any other member (good)

5- Similarity in distribution as the case of both big and its antonyms little, whereas large can refer just to the size that is physical with the brother and sister nouns.

6- The semantic contrast involving one dimension or many dimensions: Many opposites that are near seem to be found within different dimensions, although such dimensions may be related to the same concept which is a general one”.

#### 1.14. Markedness and Committedness

Specialists who study antonymy have identified some other types of opposites, and they also un general agree to use antonymy as the only the term to opposites that are grabble (i.e. the type of opposites that has many properties that are interesting such as committedness and maleness).

Committedness includes the behavior of an adjective in questions. An adjective is regarded to be committed if it “involves a particular value when it is used in a question and uncommitted or impartial if it does not contain such an implication as short' which is not committed within the question as:

23-How tall is Jack?

This question looks neutral and it could be used whether the speaker knows that Jack's approximate height or not and whether Jack is short, tall or average height. On the contrary short is committed, so, a speaker should only ask:

24 - How short is Jack?

if there is any reason to think than Jack is shorter than the normal height. Some gradable antonyms pairs contain one committed term and another uncommitted one, for example, slow/ fast, light/ heavy, young /old; some other pairs are made up of two terms that are committed, for example, sad/ happy, ugly/ beautiful, guilty/ innocent.

Lyons (1977:275) distinguishes between formal markedness where the opposition occurs at the morphological level (i.e. one of the two terms is derived from another through inflection or affixation). Adjective pairs in which one number is derived from the other an affix of negation (a, ab, an-,dis-, il-, im-, in- ,ir-, un- and non).

Morphological antonyms require separate treatment because their lexical antonymy is morphologically recoverable hence, their lexical association can be required differently from that between non – morphological antonyms.

Semantic markedness where the opposition occurs at the semantic level when two antonymous terms are also morphologically related, the formally unmarked term is also the semantically unmarked one”, for example, (clear/unclear). However, this correlation is not universal; (unbiased/biased) and (independent/dependent).

#### 1.15. The Test and Findings

The test is composed of sixteen sentences; forty five students are chosen as a sample from the fourth year students, Dept. of English Language, College of Education, and University of Babylon. The researchers had actually clarified the topic and motivated the examinees to deal with the questions actively. The answer of each sentence is of two parts, in the first the examinees must show whether each sentence is marked (writing M after each marked one) or unmarked (here they must write UN after each unmarked sentence) while in the second, they must change each marked sentence into unmarked one and vise versa.

##### 1.15.1. Model for the Test

The model to be followed in conducting the test is similar to that of Lehrer (Lehrer 1985:400). He stated a list of “most common ways in which neutralization occurs for antonymous adjectives. They can be stated as the following:

1-The marked member is neutralized in questions (*How tall /#short is he?*).

2-The marked member is neutralized in nominalizations (*warmth/#coolth*).

3-Only the unmarked member appears in measure phrases (*three feet tall/#short*).

4-If one member consists of an affix added to the antonym, the affix form is marked (*happy /unhappy*).

5-Only the unmarked member occurs with ratios (*twice as old / #young*).



6-The unmarked member is evaluatively positive, the marked is evaluatively negative (*good/ bad*).

7-The unmarked member denotes more of a quantity (*big / little* ).

8-If there are asymmetrical entailments, the unmarked member is less likely to be biased or committed (*x is better than Y: X may be good or bad . X is worse than Y : X must be bad [ not good ]*”).

### 1.15.2 The Findings

Table following table shows the achievements of the examinees in recognition and production levels with the percentages of both, the correct and erroneous responses. The percentage of the correct responses in the recognition level is 43.3 %, whereas that of the erroneous responses is 56.6 %. The last percentages explain a sort of retardation in recognizing (un)marked adjectives. In production level, the percentage of successful responses is 10.5 %, while that of failure is 89.4%. The last two percentages also show that such a group of learners are unable to produce (un)marked sentences meaningfully since they do not master using and understanding them. The total percentage of correct responses is 26.9 %, whereas that of failure in both levels is 73.1 %.

Throughout the analysis of the examinees, achievements, it is concluded that they do not master how neither to recognize nor to produce the topic as it may not be included within the materials enough and such a shallow mentioning will not give them a wide chance to understand them. Antonymous adjectives occupy a considerable part of every day verbal usage and play a vital role in the rhetoric of speech. Such a topic should be taken into consideration by syllabus designers and teachers.

Table No. 1

Item no.	Recognition Level				Production Level			
	Correct no.	Percentage	Incorrect no.	Percentage	Correct no.	Percentage	Incorrect no.	Percentage
1	8	17.7%	37	82.2%	3	6.9%	42	93.3%
2	19	42.2%	26	57.7%	1	2.2%	44	97.7%
3	17	37.7%	28	62.2%	3	6.6%	42	93.3%
4	21	46.6%	24	53.3%	2	4.4%	43	95.5%
5	27	60%	18	40%	4	8.8%	41	91%
6	17	37.7%	28	62.2%	2	4.4%	43	95.5%
7	13	28.8%	32	71%	4	8.8%	41	91.2%
8	18	40%	27	60%	1	2.2%	44	97.75
9	23	51%	22	48.8%	6	13.3%	39	86.7%
10	16	35.5%	29	64.4%	4	8.8%	41	91.2%
11	23	51%	22	48.8%	8	17%	37	82.2%
12	18	40%	27	60%	3	6.6%	42	93.3%
13	17	37.3%	28	62.2%	9	20%	36	80%
14	22	48.8%	23	51%	10	22.2%	35	77.7%
15	23	51%	22	48.8%	9	20%	36	80%
16	30	66.6%	15	33.3%	7	10%	38	84.4%
Total	312	43.3%	408	56.6%	76	10.5%	644	89.4%
	312				76			26.9%
			408				644	73.1%

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### Appendix A

Write **M** after the marked sentences changing them into unmarked ones, and write **UN** after the unmarked sentences changing them (the unmarked sentences) into marked ones.

- 1-They are quite happy.
- 2-How big is your computer?
- 3-Susan is five feet short.
- 4-The children who attend that school receive a good education.
- 5-The woman used to take long walks.
- 6-Her hugging everyone was the result of her happiness.
- 7-John did a better job than Sam.
- 8-The rout reaches its final narrowness after ten minutes.
- 9-The latest news made her unhappy.
- 10-This is twice as old.
- 11-How young is your daughter?
- 12-The article of linguistics is five pages long.
- 13-It was a bad show.
- 14-They have made little progress on the contact.
- 15-The Mexico earthquake of 1985 was worse than that of 1979.
- 16-The spot has become three times as small.